

A Letter from a Clergy-man in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, to another in London; in Vindication of the Bishop of that Diocese, from the Calumnies and Falsities cast on his Lordship; in a late little Scurrilous Pamphlet, Entitled, A Letter to a Clergy-man in the Country, concerning the Choice of Members, &c.

S I R,

I Just now Receiv'd a Pamphlet Entitled, *A Letter to a Clergy-man concerning the choice of Members of Convocation.* I send you a few Reflections on that part of it that relates to the Bishop of Bath and Wells. The Writer did craftily in concealing his Name, but very dishonestly in misrepresenting his Lordship to the Reader; He having done nothing but what became his Place and Character, and what he is in Duty obliged to. The Writ for Choice of Members for his Diocese being directed to him, he was obliged to see it Executed, and to make the Return of it. But that you may understand the bottom of those Calumnies thrown on his Lordship by the Pamphleteer, or rather his Prompter, whom he very easily and readily believed; You must know, that there is in this Diocese one Mr. Hill, Rector of Kilmington, and Prebendary of this Church, who has been twice chosen Clerk of Convocation.

He, whilst he was so, put in for the School of Brewton, and applied himself in that Matter to his Lordship; who told him plainly that he could not approve of it, Asking him, if that School did not require a Whole-man? Mr. Hill reply'd it did so! Upon which his Lordship told him, how unfit it was for him to pursue that Matter; He having a Liying of 150l. per Annum, and much subject to the Gout, and also Clerk of Convocation; which, as my Lord told him, might Sitt, and take him off form the School a great while together. Whereupon he reply'd to his Lordship, that he would resign his Clerkship of Convocation! What sincerity he used, when he told my Lord so, or how he could do it, I am not to account for. After this he was chosen to the School, and upon the Dissolution of the Parliament, put in again to be chosen Clerk of the last Convocation.

My Lord was much surpriz'd at his putting in, but much more when he understood his Methods. For he attempted to beget an ill Opinion of his Lordship among his Clergy; and to that purpose sent his Circular Letters to the Clergy by the Apparitors of my Lord's own Court; which Letters are Defamatory, and stuff'd with Falsities. I will transcribe one of them from the Original under his own Hand. It is thus superscribed;

These to be opened and communicated to the Clergy by John Newman, and to be returned to Mr. Evans at Wells. This is the Superscription. Here follows the Letter.

My Reverend Brethren!

My Lord designs to exclude me, that he may bring into Convocation, Clerks of his own Principles, such as he can bow down by Awe or Flattery. To this purpose he hath kept the Convocation Precept secret a great while, and sent all about Wells to resign their Votes to him. The Canons have in vain laboured to Reconcile him to me; on the contrary, they required to pass a Determination upon the whole Diocese against me; and when I am thus outed of the Privilege, I shall always be afflicted with vexations.

I am against admitting Presbyterian Ordinations in the Church, which will be insidiously attempted in this Convocation, and that is my only Crime. However I intend to try my Fortune, when you can assert your Liberties against such Practices; and if you do not this time, you may Elect by Congé d' Esire from the Bishop hereafter, only whom he pleases: For no Man will stand up in your Defence, after your Surrendry of me to arbitrary Lust and Prejudice.

I would therefore to save your All in this Convocation (by which we must stand or fall for ever) that you would appear without grudging the Trouble or little Expence of a Winter's Journey.

May God preserve this poor Church from Wolves and Foxes; that Jacob may not be given up to a Curse, and Israel to Reproaches.

Wells, Jan. 14th.

1700.

My Brethren, Your faithful Servant, S. Hill.

I have some Remarks to make upon this Letter, which on the day of Election his Lordship read in the Consistory to the Clergy. Mr. Hill was present, and made a speech in his own Praise; and when my Lord spoke, he told him, That he did not know what he had to do, or what Authority he had to speak there. He told his Lordship also, he knew no great difference between a Bishop and a Presbyter. When Dr. Barker Treasurer of the Church asked how he could Answer his abusing the Bishop at this rate, he reply'd Mr. Dr. what have you to do here, or You have nothing to do here. As to the Letter his Lordship ask'd him,

1. What his Principles were, which he mentioned in his Letter? to which he reply'd nothing but that he was a Peer.

2. He accused his Lordship of bowing down the Clergy by Awe or Flatteries; whereupon my Lord's Letter was produc'd, in which there was nothing like it. He said the Bishop wrote to the Clergy to resign their Votes to him: He might as well have accused him of holding correspondence with the Pope; my Lord neither commended any Man in those Letters to which he refers, nor did mention Mr. Hill, but only desired the Clergy not to come Preengaged.

3. Mr. Hill says the Canons in vain laboured to reconcile him to my Lord. This was to render his Lordship to the Clergy under the Character of an Implacable Man. My Lord ask'd the Canons one by one, if this charge against him was True: They said, It was not.

4. He says the Canons were requir'd to pass a Determination against him. They reply'd, that they were not requir'd to do so. His Lordship also is assur'd (and he will appeal to the Canons in the Case) That nothing passed against him in the Chapter.

5. He

*EB7. A100. 701.1

5. He would insinuate that the Bishop is for Presbyterian Ordinations, which he says; will be insidiously attempted in this Convocation. How truly he says this, let the world Judge; my Lord was ordain'd by a Bishop, when he was invited to be ordain'd by the Presbyterians; and that in Cromwell's time too, when there was danger in it, and when very few Men would run so much hazard as his Lordship did.

6. And for what he says, that the Bishop kept the Precept secret by him a good while; It is very False; For He laid it before his Register the same week he received it, and He took it into his hands before a Week was expir'd. In another Letter of Mr. H's (which my Lord has but a Copy of) He says again, *My Lord kept the Precept a long While.* For the Truth whereof his Lordship does appeal to the Register and Registry. For the rest of his Scurrilous Letter, viz. his complaining that he should be outed of the Privilege, which no honest Man should want. His intimation, *That the Clergy chose Convocation members by Conge D' Esire from the Bishop,* which his Lordship never expects from the Clergy; His wild Expressions of the Surrendry of him to Arbitrary Lust or Prejudice. His vanity in presuming if He, mighty Man! were in the Convocation he could save their All. His Prayer wherein he reflects not only upon his Lordship, but other Bishops under the words *Wolves and Foxes*, unbecoming any Clergyman of the Church of England. These and several other things I shall take no notice of; But only remark, that He makes use of John Newman, one of my Lord's Apparitors, to deliver his Letter, and to return it to Mr. Evans his Proctor, in which he designs to wound the Bishop, and to conceal the hand that did it.

My Lord will acknowledge that he charged Mr. Hill with an ill use that he made of his Clerkship of Convocation, viz., That he pleaded it against payment of a Debt. Mr. Hill deny'd it, and said, in a Language he had learned some where; he would be Hang'd if it were true, [Non-payment of Debts indeed does not deserve Hanging, but it argues something else not suitable to a Clergy Man's Character.] But my Lord proved this in Consistory, and then he said, *It was not a Just Debt.* This also the Bishop prov'd upon Oath, and has the Affidavit by him. Upon the Scandalous behaviour of Mr. Hill at the Election, my Lord was inform'd by many of his Clergy, that several who came to give a Vote for him, were so offended at his insolent Behaviour, that they withdrew, being ashame of his Carriage.

For the Truth of these Facts, the Bishop will refer himself to Mr. Hill's own Letters, to the Registry, and to the Testimony, as to what passed in Consistory, of Dr. Robert Creyghton, Dr. Ralph Barker, Mr. Arch deacon Clement, and Mr. Lesse, and to the Register, and indeed to all the Clergy present.

I shall now transcribe another of Mr. Hill's Letters bearing date January 14th, 1700. from Wells, and thus Superscribed.

To the Reverend Mr. Chancery and the Rest of the Canons now resident in Wells: These Humbly present. In which he accuseth them very falsely of forming a previous Election against him, and the Bishop of Implacable malice. But a Copy of the Letter under his own hand is as followeth.

My Reverend Superiors,

THO I find by your Letters that you are by Surprise and False reports (of my quitting my pretences to Election) engaged against me, yet it looks very Singular that you must be requir'd to assemble in Chapter House to form a previous Election for the Diocese. This I think is a Business without your Circle, Prejudicial to the Rural Clergy, and not very Reputable, considering that it is to be done in a Subserviency to an Implacable malice, that designs ever to ruine me (if possible) in all my interests, for none other real crime, but my Ecclesiastical Principles. You have Liberties of your own, whose danger requires your care, and therefore you ought, I should think, be tender of those of the Rural body, except we shall hold them by Conge D' Esire from the Palace. I think my labours for this Church are very ill requited with so many sorts of Persecution, and I leave it to your Conscience and sense of Honour, whether it becomes you to be Executioners of so black and undeserved a Malice. In the mean time may God preserve this poor Church from Foxes and Wolves, that Jacob may not be given up to curse, and Israel to Reproaches.

Wells Jan. 14th. I am

1700.

Reverend Sirs,

Your most humble Servant, Jam. Hill.

I could Transcribe more of his Letters but think I need not do it. It is well known that the Bishop had no difference with him till these things happened. He had formerly acknowledged that my Lord had done him some kindness. But some Men will not be pleased unless his Lordship will wrong his Conscience to promote their Interest. I know nothing unfairly done in the last Election, and my Lord declar'd, that the Clergy were left to their Liberty, and bid them nominate and chose whom they please: My Lord did indeed give the Clergy good Reason why his Lordship could not commend Mr. Hill. What I have writ to you concerning this matter does I think acquit my Lord from the Aspersions cast on him in the Pamphlet, and ought to keep him right in yours and the Opinion of all Honest and Sober Men, having done nothing but what he can answer for as Bishop of the Diocese. And in truth it is my Opinion, that if he and other Bishops did influence more, we should have a Convocation consisting of Members more for the true Interest and Honour of our Church, than the Majority of the last Convocation were.

Decemb. 8th.

I am

1701.

S I R, Your assured Friend.

P. S. I have been told, that at the beginning of last Convocation, Mr. Hill sent a Letter to Mr. Atterbury to be read in the House, as a formal Complaint of the injuries done to him in the Election. But it must be thought an argument of Mr. A's discretion, that not approving the Temper of the Writer, he never produced that Letter in the House, but wisely dropt it.